

Fire claims old factory during EPA cleanup

By Melody McDonald
TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

A segment of the Chicago Transit Authority's Green Line "L" was shut down for almost an hour Monday afternoon after a blaze ignited inside an abandoned factory full of chemicals.

Officials at the scene said seven or eight contractors hired by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency were inside Moschiano Plating Inc., 2808 W. Lake St., cleaning up hazardous materials when the fire broke out. The EPA had declared the factory a Superfund cleanup site.

Two EPA workers were transported to Bethany Hospital to be examined, a representative for the Chicago Fire Department said.

"This thing went up in a matter of minutes," said Brad Stimple, an on-scene coordinator with the emergency response branch of the EPA. "The electricity was off, but with these old buildings you never know."

Firefighters spent the afternoon extinguishing the blaze and gutting the abandoned building, leaving only charred timbers standing after the fire.

Officials said the fire was reported about noon by contractors in the building. Firefighters arrived on the scene about 5 minutes later and sent out a Level 1 hazardous material alert and ordered the CTA to halt service on its Green Line "L," which runs indirectly over the building.

For about 50 minutes, trains were turned back west at Pulaski Road and east at Ashland Avenue, while a shuttle bus transported people between the two stations, said Jeff Stern, spokesman for the CTA. The station at California Avenue was closed and didn't resume power until 2:45 p.m., Stern said.

In addition, fire officials rerouted traffic at the intersection of Lake Street and California Avenue for most of the afternoon.

The fire was struck about 1:30 p.m., but the hazardous materials alert wasn't secured until 2:10 p.m., fire officials said.

Officials said the accident is still under investigation and weren't commenting on what started the blaze.

Stimple, however, said the "possibility exists" that the accident was caused by his workers who were sampling and identifying waste materials at the time of the accident.

Stimple said the building's owner, Frank Moschiano, died in July, leaving behind steel tanks of plating, solutions, heavy metals, acids, cyanide and caustics. He said the EPA started the cleanup job, estimated at \$400,000, on Oct. 13.

"We were here to clean it up, and we have to clean it up," Stimple said. "This actually may have helped a little."



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Tribune photo by Bill Hogan

Michael Flanagan shows off the new shoes he bought for his canceled Senate campaign at a Monday news conference.

Flanagan out of Senate race

Michael Flanagan toppled the powerful Dan Rostenkowski when he went one-on-one with the beleaguered political veteran to win his congressional seat, but Monday he said he couldn't take on two candidates in a U.S. Senate Republican primary.

"What was a two-man race, one I felt confident I could win, has become a three-person contest," said Flanagan, who said it was Illinois Comptroller Loretta Didrickson's decision last week to enter the contest that made him give up.

The most formidable aspect

of Didrickson's candidacy, said Flanagan, 34, was the "party endorsement of her that followed right behind it."

With wealthy Inverness state Sen. Peter Fitzgerald able to bankroll his candidacy and Didrickson the beneficiary of GOP party resources, Flanagan said "garnering support for my own candidacy would be difficult."

Just a week before he planned to make his official campaign announcement, Flanagan instead found himself holding a news conference in a rehabbed West Loop office building to officially announce his non-candidacy.

but account

By Nancy Ryan
TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

For the first time in more than a decade, the Chicago Housing Authority will be able to rely on one of the management tools considered essential by most businesses and government agencies: Financial records that actually reflect reality.

That was the conclusion of an audit released Monday by an independent accounting firm, Deloitte & Touche, of the agency's fiscal year ending Dec. 31, 1996, which showed that CHA's financial books are "clean" and accurate after years of sloppy and questionable record-keeping.

In another housing development, President Clinton is expected to sign legislation this week that requires landlords who are renewing their Section 8 contracts to charge market-rate rents, a measure that should save the federal government \$1.6 billion over five years because many owners had charged higher rents. The bill renews existing contracts for one year.

Cleaning up its accounting practices was one of the first goals established by the current Clinton administration when the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development took control of the troubled agency in late spring. A task most of the leadership expected to take well over a year to accomplish. In the process, outside auditors issued "discla-

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